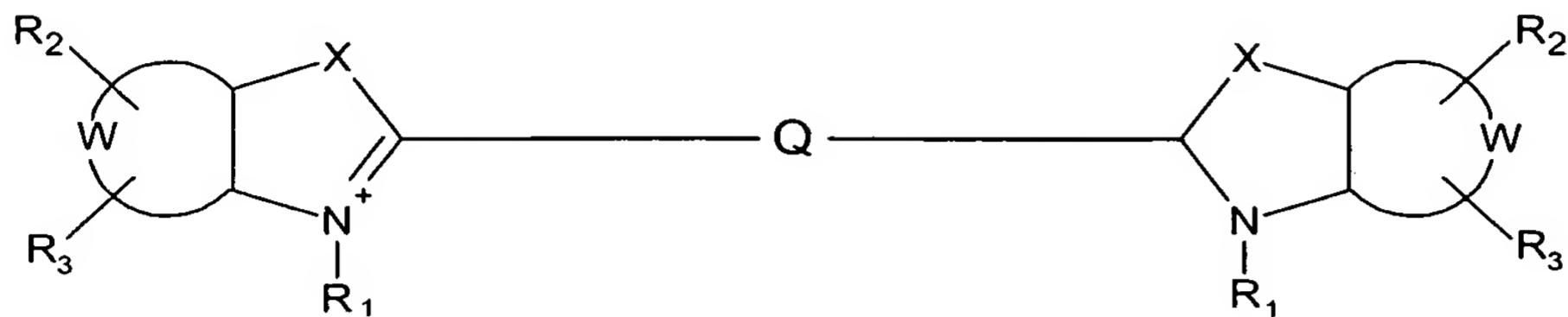


In the Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A symmetric cyanine of the formula:



(1)

wherein:

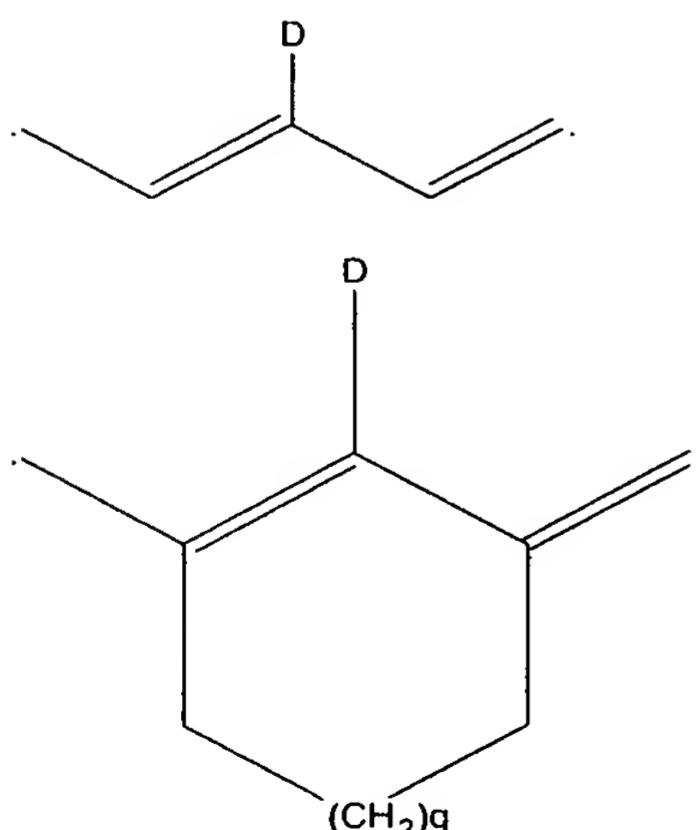
~~X is selected from the group consisting of O, S and C(CH₃)₂;~~

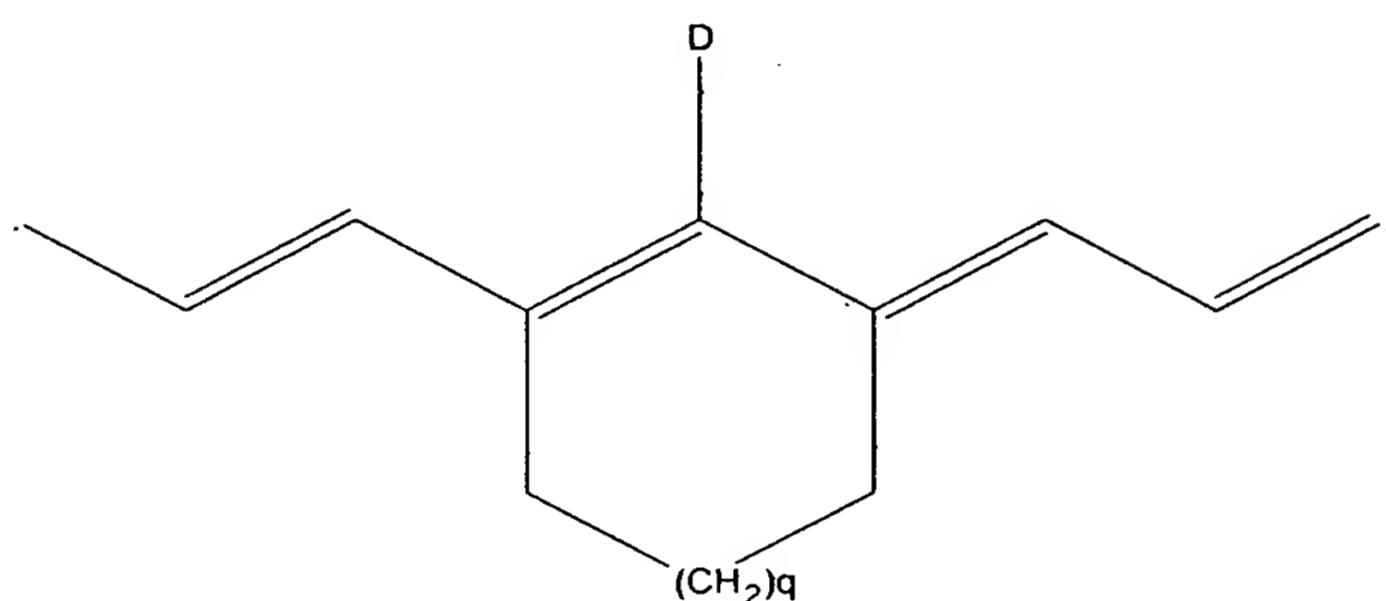
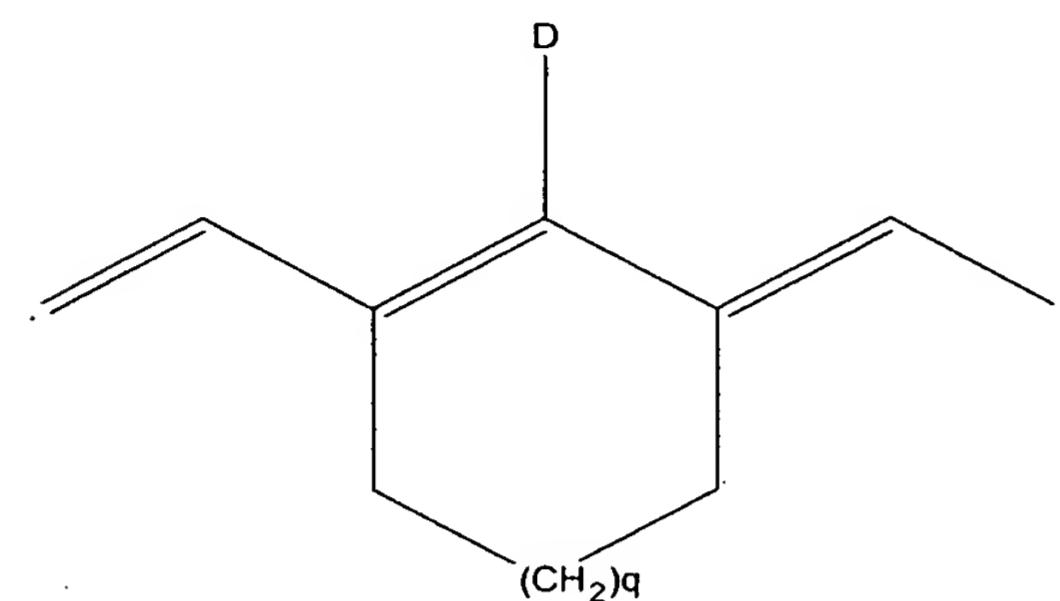
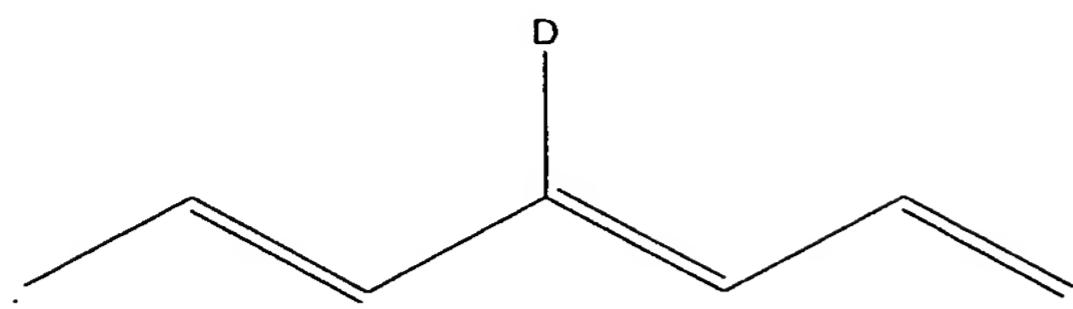
W represents non-metal atoms required to form a benzo-condensed or a naphto-condensed ring;

R₁ is selected from the group consisting of (CH₂)_nCH₃, (CH₂)_nSO₃⁻ and (CH₂)_nSO₃H, wherein n is an integer selected from 0 to 6 when R₁ is (CH₂)_nCH₃, and n is an integer selected from 3 to 6 when R₁ is (CH₂)_nSO₃⁻ or (CH₂)_nSO₃H;

R₂ and R₃ are independently selected from the group consisting of H, a sulphonic moiety and a sulphonate moiety;

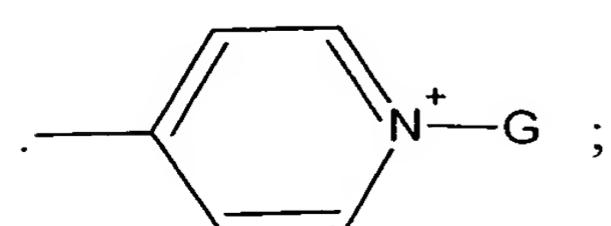
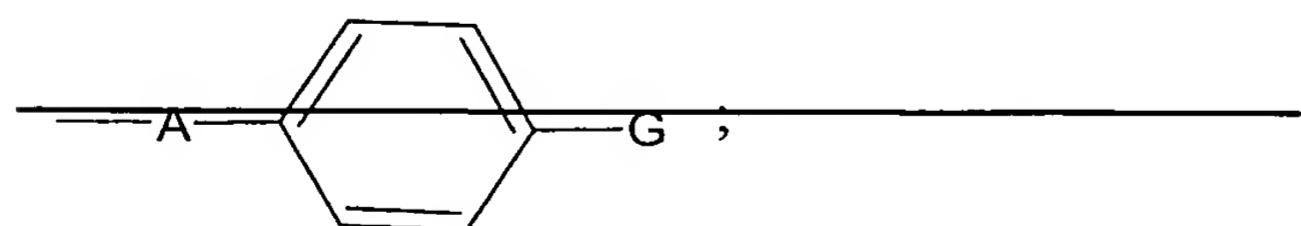
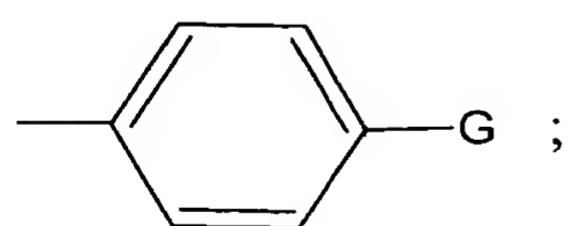
Q is selected from the group consisting of:





wherein q is 0 or 1 and D is selected from the group consisting of:

$-C\equiv C-G$;



wherein A is O or S;

G is a nucleophile moiety selected from the group consisting of $(CH_2)_mNH_2$, $(CH_2)_mSH$, $(CH_2)_mY(CH_2)_pOH$, $(CH_2)_mY(CH_2)_pNH_2$ and $(CH_2)_mY(CH_2)_pSH$, wherein Y is selected from the group consisting of -NH-, -CONH-, -O- and -S-, m is an integer selected from 0 to 6 and p is an integer selected from 1 to 6;

or wherein G is a moiety capable of reacting with N, O or S nucleophiles, and is selected from the group consisting of $(CH_2)_mCOOH$, $(CH_2)_m$ glycidyl, $(CH_2)_m$ maleimide, $(CH_2)_mCO-NHS$, $(CH_2)_mCO$ -imidazole, $(CH_2)_mSO_2CH=CH_2$, $(CH_2)_mCONHNH_2$, $(CH_2)_mCHO$, $(CH_2)_mY(CH_2)_pCOOH$, $(CH_2)_mY(CH_2)_p$ glycidyl, $(CH_2)_mY(CH_2)_p$ maleimide, $(CH_2)_mY(CH_2)_pCO-NHS$, $(CH_2)_mY(CH_2)_pCO$ -imidazole, $CH_2(CH_2)_mO-PAM$, $(CH_2)_mY(CH_2)_pSO_2CH=CH_2$, $(CH_2)_mY(CH_2)_pCONHNH_2$, $(CH_2)_mY(CH_2)_pCHO$ and $(CH_2)_mY(CH_2)_pO-PAM$, wherein Y, m and p have the meanings indicated above.

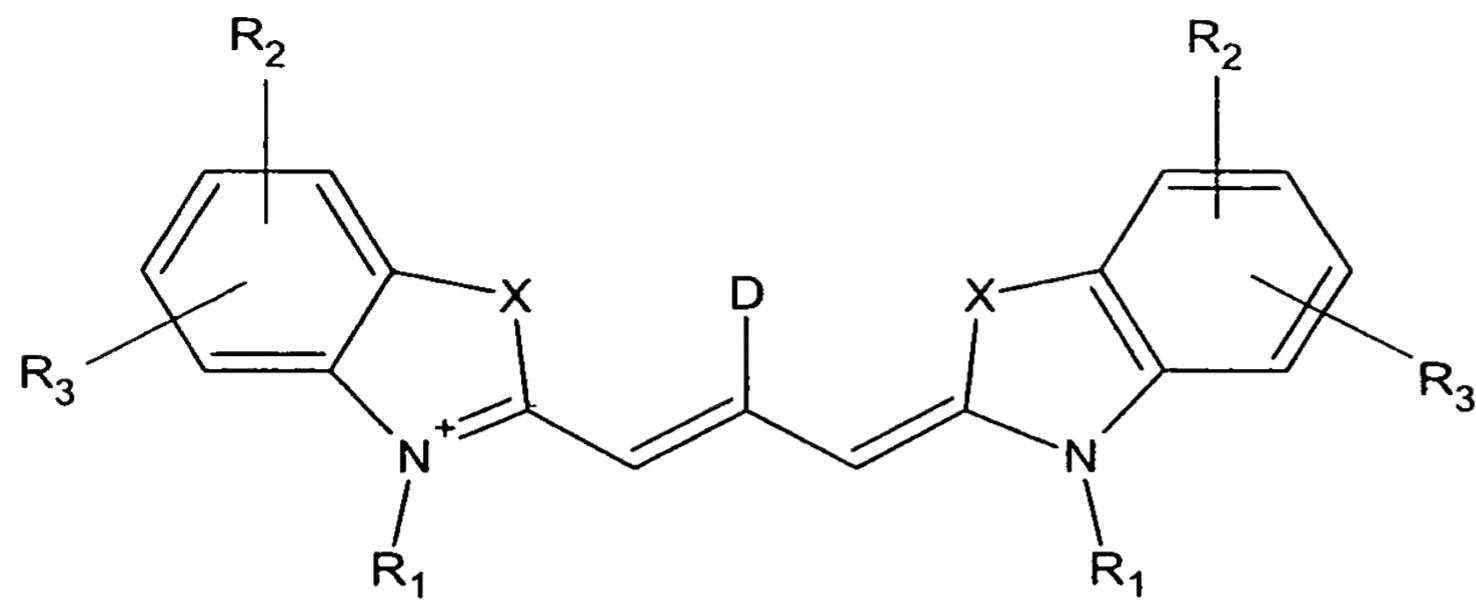
2. (Original) A symmetric cyanine according to claim 1, wherein at least one of the moieties R_1 to R_3 is, or contains a sulphonic moiety or a sulphonate moiety.

3. – 4. (Cancelled)

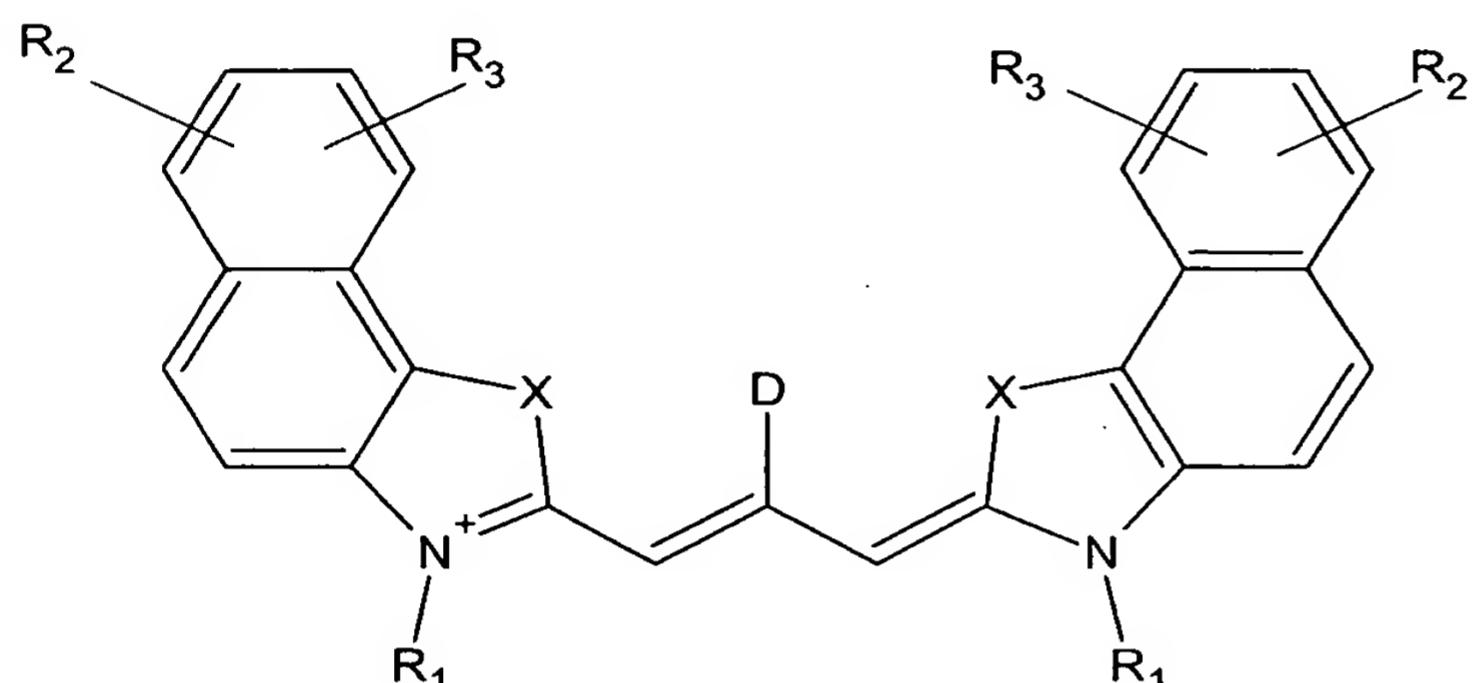
5. (Original) A symmetric cyanine according to claim 4, wherein R_1 is $(CH_2)_nSO_3^-$ or $(CH_2)_nSO_3H$.

6. (Cancelled)

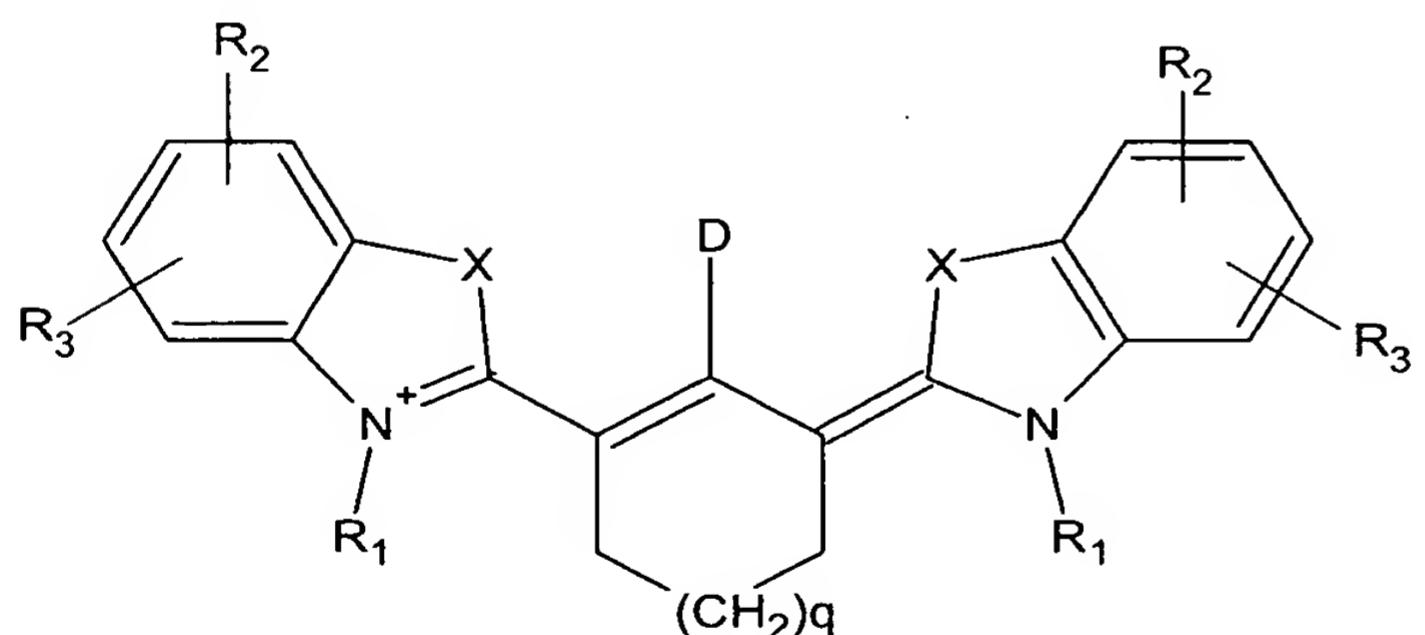
7. (Original) A symmetric cyanine according to claim 1 having any of the formulae 2a to 2l:



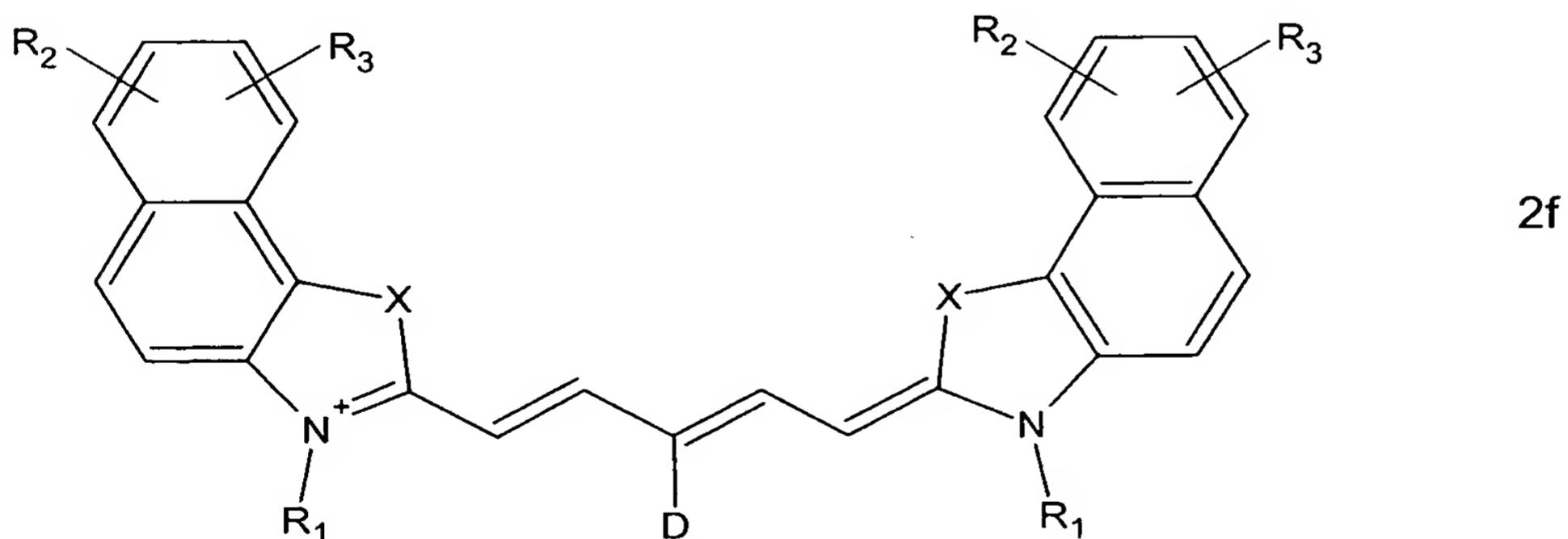
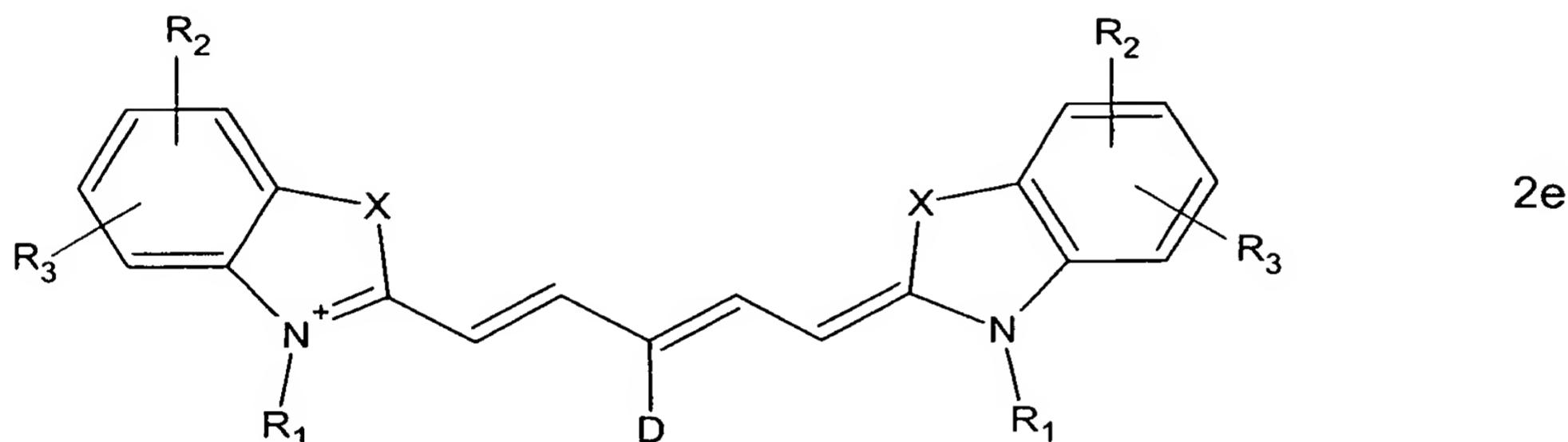
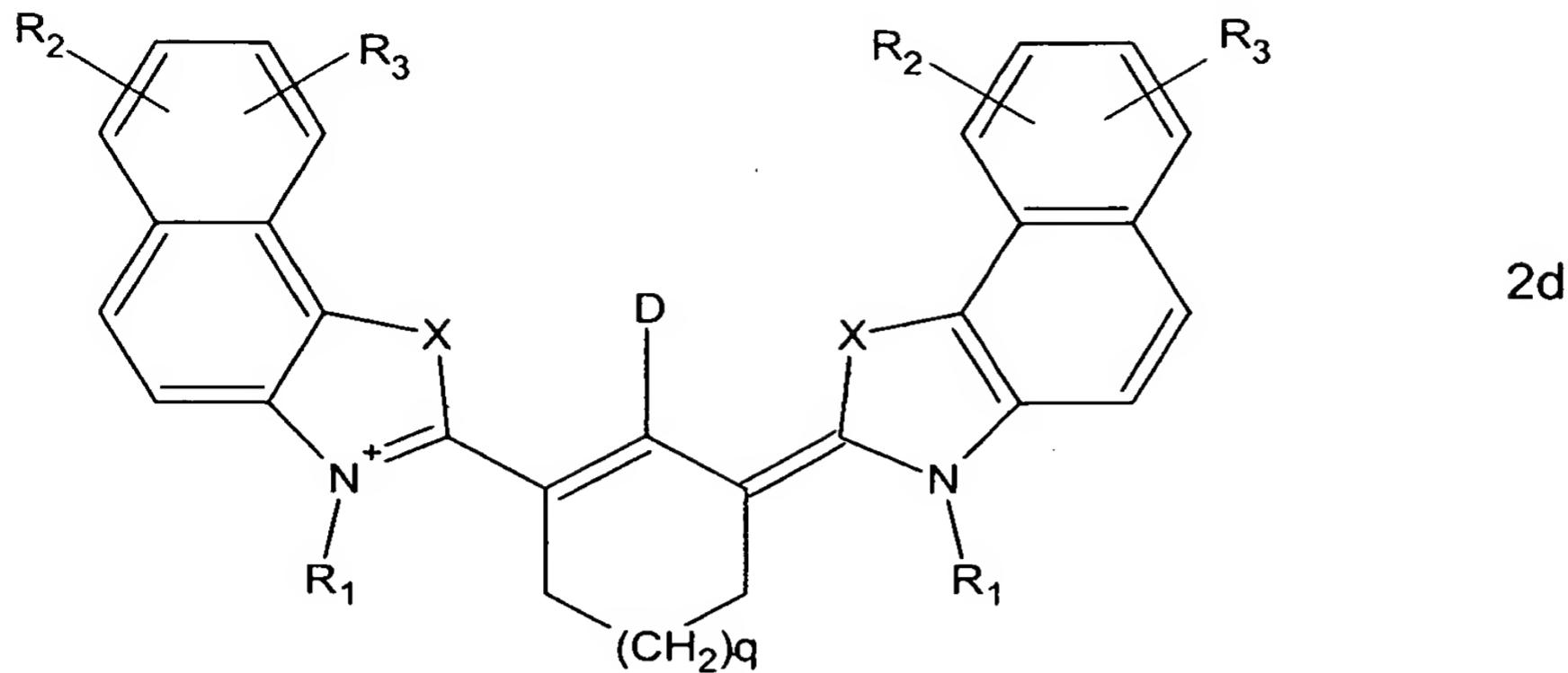
2a

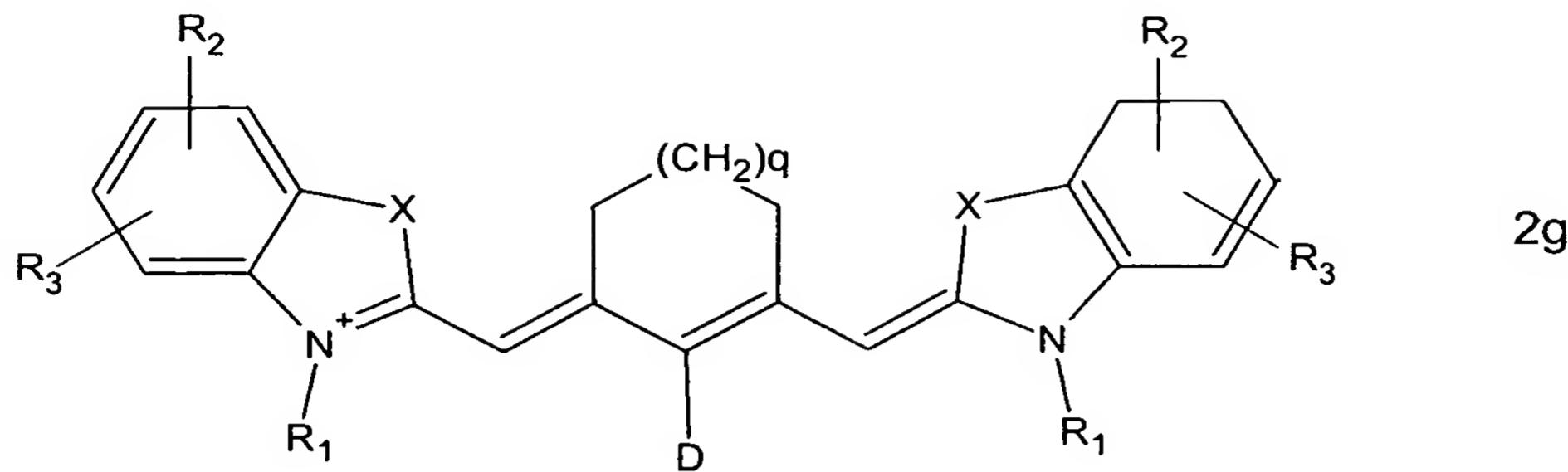


2b

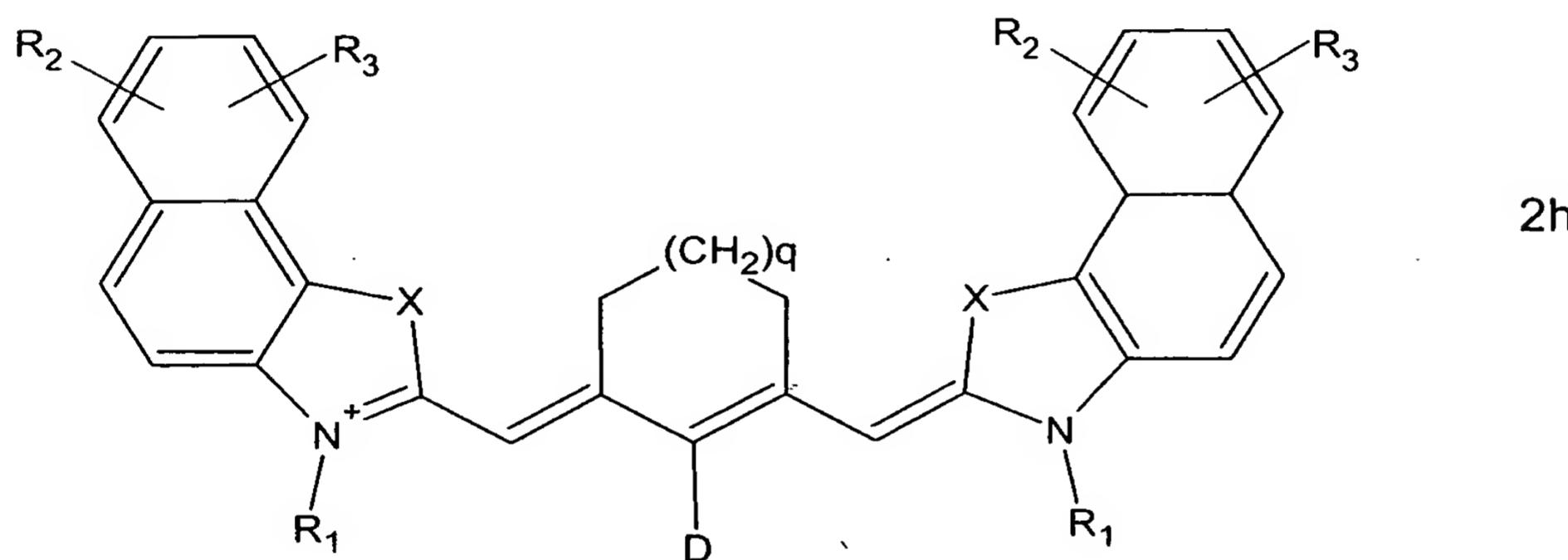


2c

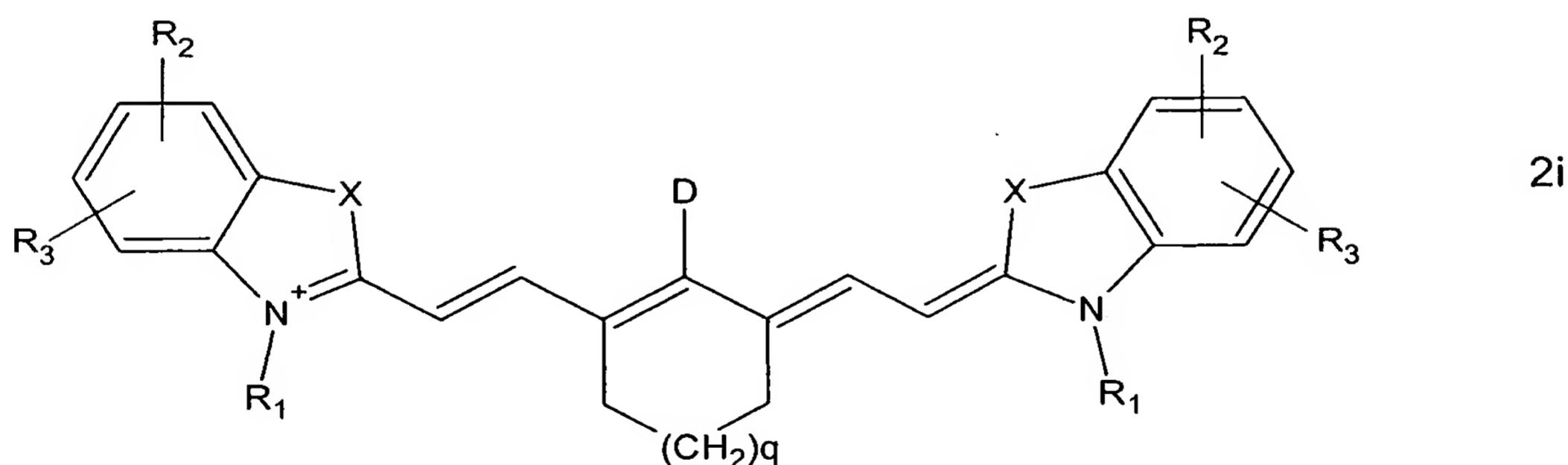




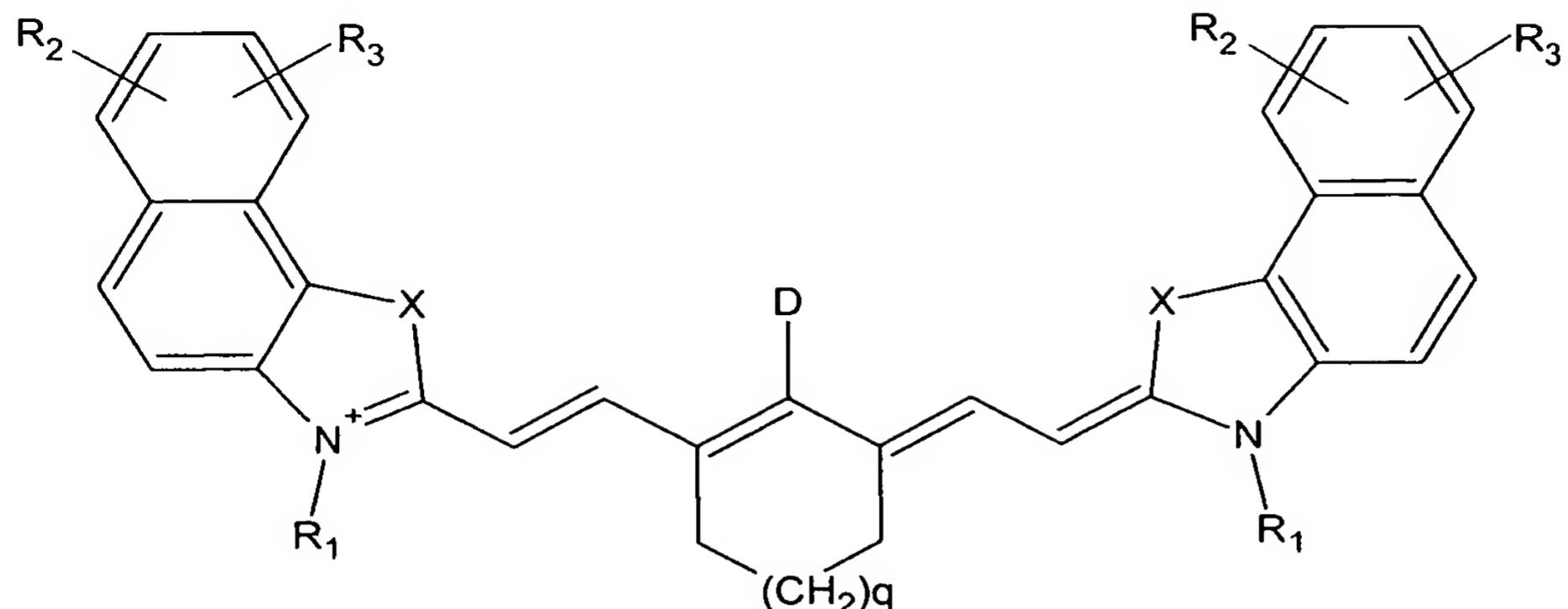
2g



2h



2i



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wherein R_1 , R_2 , R_3 , X , q and D have the meanings indicated in claim 1.